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Ending Slavery in Sudan

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Ending slavery in Sudan

RICHARD A. LOBBAN Jr.

chase slaves for $40 to $60 each (or two or three goats) depending upon age and gender. Then they are freed in secure regions.

Some criticize this, saying that even humbly motivated purchases may create or expand the market for slaves and thus be counterproductive. I do not believe that there is sufficient evidence to make this case, and one must see that the presence of slaves is a result of the war, not its cause. Moreover, the slaves who are purchased and released represent only a small number in this widespread practice.

The more radical approach, let's call it the Harriet Tubman model, of escorting contraband slaves to freedom on an “Underground Railway” through enemy lines is not a major activity. Nor am I aware of a “John Brown approach” of militant abolition in which slave traders have been attacked at gunpoint and told to hand over their slaves without compensation. As long as the war continues, slaves will be produced and individuals may be freed but the institutional and military basis of slavery will not be changed. This much should be known from our own history.

So we come to the urgency of ending the war and restoring secular democracy to the Sudan. Unlike Iraq or Kosovo, the entire Sudanese opposition is united under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to bring it to an end. The Sudanese conflict is not inherently a matter of religion: it is a matter of a military regime overthrowing Sudanese democracy and covering its crimes under the green flag of Islam.

When this conflict is over, one expects that the successor government will quickly declare official emancipation from what is a fundamental violation of human rights — and a war crime. This situation is far worse than Kosovo in scale, duration and brutality. At least the Kosovars can escape to miserable refugee camps in neighboring countries. But because there are no national interests at stake, or because of racial prejudice, the world wrongly ignores this Sudanese conflict and dismisses it as insoluble.

In recent years, a diverse abolitionist movement has emerged to publicize the issue of slavery in the Sudan. Its religious and humanitarian founders are people with great compassion who deserve much credit for their lone voices and bravery. A strategy that they use has been to raise money to pur-